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# Between Armament and Disarmament

By Dr. Curt Gasteyger

The months ahead may be of decisive importance for the future course of both strategic armament and the chances for its limitation or control. Developments of the past year or two contain the seeds for either option. On the one hand, the United States is about to make some far-reaching decisions regarding procurement of new weaponry, while the Soviet Union has kept making enormous efforts in the fields of both strategic and conventional armament. Either development finds its prolongation in the armament efforts of the two alliances, NATO and the Warsaw Pact. In addition the arms race has engendered a growing militatization in many areas of the Third World. On the other hand, more efforts are being made at various levels to arrive at least at some measure of arms control. Conflicting as they may appear, these trends are closely interrelated: because all attempts to-date at calling a halt to the arms race have failed, its limitation is being sought with growing urgency.

Of course, not unlike the quarrels about environmental protection, each party expects the other to go ahead first. To accuse one side alone of being primarily or solely responsible for the arms race would be too simplistic if not outright wrong. Both superpowers are inescapably interlocked in it and share a great amount of mutual responsibility for it. It is therefore both ludicrous and implausible if Moscow alleges that

any increase in Western armament – in particular the introduction of the neutron bomb – be directed against



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détente. By massively increasing her own offensive capability the Soviet Union herself has caused the West to respond. However, we know that a sensible East-West dialogue is possible only if a *mutually accepted* balance of forces exists. To pretend, as Moscow does, that détente was made possible only as a result of growing *Soviet* military power contributes substantially to mutual distrust which has always been the very source of any arms race.

If, in turn, it is stated that Western defence efforts are primarily a reaction to what the Soviet Union is doing, this claim does not stand up to closer scrutiny either. Nor indeed do contentions that the Soviet Union is on her way to strategic superiority.

## US Maintains Technology Lead

They not only show a lack of confidence in Western defence capability, but pass over too easily a number of developments which clearly favour the West. Thus the United States still maintains a substantial lead in advanced technology; it is about to introduce new weapon systems which the Soviet military is manifestly envious of, and in the early eighties it will have an esti-

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mated total of 14,000 nuclear warheads against the Soviet Union's 7,500.

Mutual deterrence remains vital for both sides; neither can have an interest to undermine it. Even allowing for a pessimistic evaluation of Soviet arms policy it seems highly improbable that it is aimed at precisely doing that. However, neither side should delude itself that the introduction of new strategic weapons will not affect the strategic balance, or simply raise it to a higher level where, by some miracle, it remains as stable as it was before. Rather, certain weapons developments under way are almost bound to have a unsettling effect on the present system of mutual deterrence. They include on the Soviet side the ever growing number of heavy and increasingly accurate ballistic missiles – such as the land-based SS-18 and SS-19 and the mobile SS-X-20 with variable range and directed primarily against Western Europe, as well as the alarming development of “killer satellites” aimed at downing those of the adversary.

## Senseless Development

While one may, if pressed, explain the deployment of missiles as an attempt by Moscow to compensate for its technological backwardness, no reasonable explanation can be found for the development of killer satellites. Both superpowers are using satellites for strategic intelligence. Accordingly, they have explicitly recognized the rôle of these satellites in monitoring the observance of the first SALT agreement. As a result, reconnaissance satellites have become an essential prerequisite for mutual confidence building and arms control. Hence, should in fact the Soviet Union be on the way to developing means of eliminating these satellites, this would seem both irrational and irresponsible.

As regards the United States, it is less the introduction of the much disputed neutron bomb than that of cruise missiles and mobile intercontinental missiles (such as the MX) which could compromise strategic stability. The cruise missiles' operational possibilities are so varied that it will be difficult to subsume them under any of the “classical” headings used so far in arms control negotiations: they are at the same time strategic and tactical, have a dual – nuclear and conventional – capacity and can serve c

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of enormous military significance, it makes any international agreement on their political control very difficult indeed. If, as seems highly probable, West European countries are to acquire cruise missiles, this will fundamentally alter the hitherto bilateral framework of the SALT negotiations into which they have so far been included as being of exclusive concern to the two superpowers.

The introduction of mobile land-based missiles represents a challenge of a different kind: strategic stability so far rested on the fact that part of the strategic forces – in particular the ICBMs – are vulnerable to each other's attack, the submarine-based missiles alone being still practically invulnerable. The moment one side attempts drastically to reduce the vulnerability of the land-based forces by making them mobile, it abrogates the implicit acceptance of mutual vulnerability. The other side cannot but feel more vulnerable and thus less secure; its temptation to launch a pre-emptive strike may grow, whereas additional security could be an invitation for the adversary to taking greater risks. Either possibility could equally compromise the continued effectiveness of the balance of mutual deterrence. The balance between armament, deterrence and security is therefore highly fragile and the kind of armament referred to above is likely to jeopardize it. This explains President Carter's reluctance to go for major new weapon systems.

## President Carter's Dilemma

However, he can justify his restraint only if tangible progress is achieved in the field of arms control primarily with Moscow. There is at present no lack of opportunities to do so.

Firstly, the Special Session of the UN General Assembly on disarmament is scheduled to start in May. Its result, at best, will be additional pressure upon the two superpowers for more substantial progress in cutting or slowing down their armament. On the whole, however, the UN has been a largely inadequate platform for dealing with as highly politicized and complex a

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on disarmament (the SALT) has made only modest achievements in the more than fifteen years of negotiations. Today it counts the extension of the nuclear test ban agreement to include underground tests and the prohibition of chemical weapons among its more promising topics. No agreement is, however, at hand in either field. Likewise, the mutual force reduction talks in Vienna (MBFR) have hardly gone beyond the preliminaries. Here the difficulty lies primarily in the different understanding the two blocs have of the *political* rôle of armed forces rather than in a fundamental agreement about the desirability of reducing the enormous concentration of military might on the continent.

## Dialogue is Vital

What therefore remains as the hard core and starting point for arms control is the dialogue between the two superpowers. And in fact one is surprised to see that never before have they been engaged in so many simultaneous negotiations in this field as they are today. First priority is still given to the strategic arms limitations talks (SALT II)\*. After all the ups and downs of recent negotiations the two sides now expect to reach some kind of agreement during the current year and enter into a third round thereafter. At the same time, negotiations are under way or being initiated in other fields: on a limitation of American and Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean; on restraining arms sales to the Third World or, should Moscow take up President Carter's invitation, on banning the deployment of killer satellites.

The disarmament agenda is thus quite impressive. Past experience shows that expectations should not be set too high. But it would be equally wrong to consider such negotiations as mere window-dressing on the part of the two superpowers. To be sure, there is always an element of propaganda in this game. Yet, neither side will be able to avoid completely the hard question as to how much disarmament is possible and how much armament remains necessary in order to maintain a viable defence and a credible deterrence. Neither question invites an easy answer.

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